Protecting Families from Being Broken

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Dear Sangha, today is the 2nd of August 1998, and we are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we are going to speak and listen to Vietnamese.

There was a mother lion who was looking for something to eat. She was a future mother—she was pregnant—but she hadn't given birth to the baby lion yet. That morning, the mother lioness was running after a deer. The deer knew there was a lioness running after her, so she ran very fast. She didn't know whether she would get away from the lioness, or not, because she was still quite a small deer. Although the mother lion was quite strong, she was rather heavy, because she was carrying this baby lion cub in her womb.

She ran after the deer for a long time, fifteen minutes, and still the lioness had not caught up with the deer. Then they came to a ditch, and the little deer jumped across the ditch and got over to the other side. The lioness was very unhappy, because she was hungry, she needed food not only for herself, but also for the cub in her womb. So she made a tremendous effort to jump over that ditch, and the lioness put her two back legs on the ground, and put all her energy into jumping. But a misfortune happened, and she lost her lion cub. The cub fell from her body, and fell deep into the ditch. The mother lion had jumped to the other side, when she realized that she had lost her cub. The misfortune had happened— she had lost that little cub she had been waiting for, for so long, that she loved so much, just because of one moment of forgetfulness. She had forgotten that she had this cub in her womb and that she had to be very careful. She had just forgotten that for a minute, and so she couldn't keep the lion cub. Only one moment of not being mindful, and she had lost her little cub.

After she had jumped over the ditch, the lioness didn't want anything. She wasn't interested in following the deer anymore. She didn't want anything to eat, or anything to drink. She thought that her life wasn't worth living any more. The little lion cub that she had loved, that she had been waiting for, for so many months, she had lost. He had fallen into the ditch, and the ditch was very deep. He must have died in falling like that, and so she just stood on the other side of the ditch and cried. This is the story that the Buddha tells in the sutra, and today I am telling you children this story.

This mother lioness went home to her cave, and for four or five days she didn't drink or eat anything. She didn't feel hungry at all, because the suffering in her heart was so great. She had lost her cub, and so she didn't want anything else. The cub was her reason for living; he was her love, so how could she be happy when she had lost the little cub?

But in the end she felt less sad, and a week later, she started hunting again. This time she went hunting because she was so hungry. Now she could run quite fast, because she didn't have the cub, and she was able to catch her prey quite quickly. She carried on like this for a whole year. Then, one day she was walking in the woods, and she saw a little

lion who was climbing up a tree, with a lot of monkeys. This lion was very good at climbing trees; he was as good as the monkeys.

The mother lioness thought, "That is my lion cub that I thought was dead. But look! He is alive." And that was the truth. When that little lion fell into the ditch, there was a big monkey up in the trees who saw what was happening, and went and picked up the little lion cub and took him home and looked after him, giving him monkey milk to drink. That is the reason that the lion cub grew up. He learned how to climb up trees, and he learned how to be vegetarian, since lions usually aren’t vegetarian. But this little lion only ate fruit and leaves, just like the monkeys. Instead of learning how to roar, he learned how to make a noise like *chkk-chkk-chkk-chkk*, like a monkey makes, and he was very happy living and playing with the monkeys. The mother monkey loved this little lion just as much as she loved her own monkey children. The lion and the monkeys lived together like brothers and sisters, and there wasn’t any discrimination between them. The little lion cub didn’t suspect that he was a lion. He just thought that he was a monkey, and that he was the child of the mother monkey. How could he know that his mother was a lioness, and that he too was a lion?

That day this lioness was walking through the woods, and she saw her child climbing up the trees and playing with the monkeys. Then she knew, "My little cub is still alive. But now he has grown used to being like a monkey." So the mother lion didn’t say anything straight away. She was making a plan for how to bring the lion cub home, because she had not been the mother all this time.

Therefore, the lioness waited for a day when the monkeys weren’t around, and she went to the baby lion and she said, "Do you know that you are a lion? That you are my child?" She said it in the lion language, and then the little lion said, "You are not my mother. You don’t look like my mother—my mother looks quite different. My mother gives me milk to drink, my mother holds me in her arms and takes me up in the trees. So how do you dare come and say that you are my mother. I am very angry with you!" This is what the little lion said.

The lioness knew that she had made a mistake—this was a very clumsy way of saying it. She shouldn’t have said it straight out like that; she should have said it much more skillfully. So, she went away and she started to think again. I don’t know whether she was doing walking meditation, but she was walking quite slowly. She was thinking, "How can I make acquaintance with my lion cub, and bring him back home, so we can live together with love?"

She waited for fifteen days, and then she saw that little lion cub again, and he was on his own. In a very polite way she said, "Little one, are you feeling happy today? I’m very honored to see you again. I’m sorry that the other day I thought you were my child, but in fact I was wrong. You are a very beautiful little monkey, and I want to be your friend, so we can play together."

The little lion, when he heard this, felt very happy about it, and he said, "Good, now this lady accepts that I am a monkey. I can’t put up with being told I’m a lion." So he said, "Okay, I agree. I’m happy to be your friend. But on one condition—you mustn’t ever call me a lion. I’m a monkey, and you must call me monkey."

So the mother lioness said, "Yes, that’s right. Of course, you are not my child, you are a monkey, and you are the child of a beautiful mother monkey." Thanks to this kind speech, the mother was able to make friends with the little lion. They had just played for a few minutes, and then the lioness said, "Okay, let’s leave each other now for the time being, and I’ll come back and play with you another day." Therefore the little lion felt very happy: "This lioness is very polite, she doesn’t force me to do anything, it’s fun to play with her."

Then one day the mother lion asked the little lion to come and play a long way away, because they had started to be quite close to each other. The mother lion had been quite patient, because she knew that if she was not patient, there would be no way for her to bring her lion cub home, to become part of her family, to meet the father lion, and live in the lion community. Therefore the lioness was very careful, she used very gentle words, and she was very patient. Then she asked the lion cub to come and play quite a long way away, and they came to a river, a very clear stream of water. And the mother lioness said, "Little one, please have some water to drink, because we are thirsty after having played so long." While they were drinking the water, the reflection of the mother lioness and the little lion cub could be seen in the water. They looked down in the water and they could see the reflection of themselves very clearly—on the one side there was the little lion cub, and on the other the lioness. Suddenly an idea came into the mother lioness’s

head. She said, "Let’s not drink any more water, and let’s just look at ourselves in the mirror of the water."

When the mother lioness looked into the water, she saw herself. But when the lion cub looked into the water, he saw a lion cub. He didn’t see a monkey. He had never looked into a mirror or the water before. He didn’t know who that lion cub was that he was seeing in the water. When he looked up, he just saw one lion, but when he looked into the river, he saw a lion and a lion cub. Then, the lioness mother had a very skillful idea, and she put out her tongue, and she said to the little lion, "Put out your tongue," and he saw the lion cub putting out his tongue. Then the lion cub started to have doubts about being a monkey. He thought, "Maybe I’m not a monkey after all."

Then the mother lioness lifted up her front paw, and pressed down on the water, and said to the lion cub, "Please do the same thing with your paw." The lion cub saw the reflection of a lion cub lifting up a front paw and putting it down into the water. Then the lion mother opened her mouth very wide, and he saw in the river a lioness opening her mouth very wide. Then she said to the lion cub, "Open your mouth wide." He saw in the river a lion cub opening his mouth wide.

Then the mother saw that the lion cub was beginning to see that he was a lion, and so she felt that the transformation had taken place. So the lioness roared, and put her two back legs on the ground and jumped over to the other side. The lion cub did the same thing, and he roared like a lion. It was the first time he hadn’t made noise like a monkey, but made a noise like a lion. He jumped over to the other side just like his mother, and then he knew that he was a lion cub. The mother lion went in front, and the lion cub ran behind, and the two went back to the cave of the lioness. We should remember that this story was told by the Buddha to his students.

(Bell)

The mother lioness knew how to breathe, and the lion cub should also know how to breathe. So from that day the lioness began to teach the lion cub the behavior of lions: how to walk, how to stand, how to lie down and sit like a lion, to speak like a lion, to roar like a lion. She taught the lion cub how to jump high in the air, how to jump over rivers and over fallen trees, and to run after prey. This training lasted many weeks, but the lion cub learned quickly, and in three weeks he was able to do everything, which the mother lioness did. It was like a twenty-one day retreat. We can learn everything in those twenty-one days.

After the lion cub grew up and became a real lion, he sat next to his mother, and said to her, "I know I am a lion, and I am not a monkey. But I still love my monkey family. I know that if that monkey family hadn’t been there, I would be dead. I love my monkey mother, I love my monkey brothers and sisters, so please mother, let me go home and visit my monkey mother who brought me up."

Therefore the mother knew that her cub was already old enough to go back and visit her monkey family. She said, "Yes, you should go back and see them, because they taught you many good things. You learned things that I can’t do. For instance, eating fruits, and climbing up trees. You can do that, but I still have to learn those things. You miss your monkey family, and you feel grateful to them, and that’s very good. So I’m very happy for you to go back and visit your monkey-mother and monkey-brothers and sisters".

The young lion was very happy. He was able to live the life of a lion and the life of a monkey. The life of a lion has wonderful things in it, and the life of a monkey also has wonderful things in it. When they had a lot of meat to eat in the lion family, he thought, "Oh, before I used to eat just fruit." And he saw that there was a difference between himself and the lioness. The lioness just knows how to eat meat, and had never eaten anything else. But the small lion knew how to eat things such as fruits, and most lions never know how to eat fruits. They never experience that. So this little lion, with the experience of being both monkey and lion, had a lot of happiness. In the first place, the mother and father of this lion loved him, and he didn’t have one mother—he had two mothers, and both mothers loved and understood him. When he went back to the monkey family and told them the whole story of what had happened, the monkey mother was very happy, and was happy to allow the lion to go back and live with his lion family. She didn’t try to force him to stay with the monkey family. She said, "Please, go back home and live with your lion family. Come and visit me and your brothers and sisters here from time to time." So the young lion was very happy.

The Buddha said that all of us come from a good lineage. We have the capacity to be happy, to be free, to be solid.

But because we live in a society, which is not favorable to our progress, we forget that we can live happily as free people, solidly. We can take solid steps like a free person, like an enlightened person. We can sit solidly like a lion, without being afraid of anything. We can walk, stand, sit and lie down like an enlightened person, and in this process of walking, sitting and lying down like this, we can have a great deal of happiness, solidity and freedom. But we have been trained in such a way that we don't act like that. So when we have breakfast, for example, we don't know how to eat our breakfast. We eat our breakfast without being solid, without being free. When we take our bottle of milk, and we pour it into our bowl, we are thinking about something else. We allow our sadness, our anger or our worries to obscure us. We do not have the capacity to pick up our jug of milk and our bowl like a free person. We don't have the capacity to pour the milk out and stay in the present moment at the same time. When we are pouring milk like this, we don't know that this is the milk made for us by the cow, and that the farmer has milked the cow. Our mind is somewhere else. And we put down the jug of milk, and we keep thinking about this, that, and the other, and we are completely unable to be aware of the real present moment. When we are eating a piece of bread, or dipping our bread into our milk, or we are stirring chocolate or cocoa into our milk, and putting a lot of sugar into our milk, we are not aware of that, because we don't know how to stay in the present moment. The milk is very good, the bread is very good, but we eat it as if it's not good at all.

Today I had my breakfast with a novice monk, and we sat very still, looking out of a large window at the view outside. We sat very solidly, and I poured the milk in a very mindful, very leisurely way. I saw the milk as real milk, coming from the cow, and I felt very grateful. I felt very happy that today I can drink a glass of milk. I only drink a little glass of milk, and I don't put any sugar in it. I break off a piece of bread, and I smell the bread, and I see that the bread is very fragrant, and then I bite it off, and I chew it. I know that I am chewing bread, and I know that outside the window there is the blue sky, there is the forest, there are the birds singing, and I dwell in the present moment, and I see that this piece of bread that's in my mouth tastes so good. I don't chew it twice and then swallow it; I chew it thirty, forty, fifty times, and this bread becomes very sweet and very tasty. When I dip the bread into my bowl of milk—this is just a bowl of milk, there's no sugar in it, there's no cocoa in it, there's no chocolate in it—and when I put the bread in my mouth, I see the richness of the milk, the fragrance of the milk, and I chew the milk as well. Have you ever chewed milk? Or do you just know how to drink milk? Milk is to be chewed, and when you put the bread into the milk and then suck the milk out of it, you chew it thirty or forty times, and quite naturally it will be very, very tasty. A hundred or two hundred times more tasty than if you just put it in your mouth quickly and swallow it straight away. So I think I have to invite you children to come to my hut and eat the bread like this.

When I chew bread I say to myself, "I have arrived. I am home, here and now, solid, free." Or I say, "Here is the Pure Land, the Pure Land is here." Smiling in mindfulness, I stay in the present moment, and as I chew I am really there in the present moment. I am a free person; I feel very light. Every moment of eating bread like that is a moment of great happiness, so much happiness. I don't have to think, "Oh, dear, in a minute I have to go down to the Lower Hamlet and give a Dharma Talk, and then I have to lead walking meditation." I don't think about the future. Now I am eating my breakfast, and I have to eat my breakfast in such a way that I can be happy, that I can be a free person. I know that I don't need to eat very much, I just need to eat very carefully, I need to chew very carefully. I need to dwell in the present moment, and then the taste of the bread and the milk is very good, a hundred times better than if I didn't eat carefully. I don't need to eat very much. I just need a piece of bread about two or three inches long. I just have twenty mouthfuls of bread, and a small bowl of milk, without any chocolate, without any jam. It's only when we eat quickly that we need jam and chocolate, because we don't get the sweetness when we eat so quickly. I used to eat a little butter, but nowadays I don't eat butter any more, and I never have cocoa or chocolate, and I never have jam. But my breakfast is very good, very tasty. Maybe if you looked at my breakfast, you wouldn't think that it looked very tasty, but it you eat it like I eat, then it will be very tasty.

Now, let's think how they eat their breakfast in the town. They eat it in such a rush. They eat it like a thief, a thief who doesn't have time to sit down and eat, who hasn't got time to sit down and see the other person who is sitting opposite. They don't see the person sitting next to them, they don't see the person in front of them, and they do not see the food either, because their head is completely obscured by their ideas, by their worries, by their sadness, by their anger. Sometimes we are so angry that we pick up our newspaper and we hold it in front of our faces at breakfast time, so that we don't have to look at anybody else. We've seen these people enough all ready, we don't want to see them anymore, so we pick up the newspaper and put it in front of our faces. That means that in our breakfast we have an extra, unnecessary ingredient, and that is the newspaper. What do we need a newspaper for when we're having

breakfast? We can't eat properly, we can't look at our family properly, and then everybody goes off in their own direction. In the morning we would have a wonderful opportunity to sit together and look at each other, but we don't do it. We would be so happy if we could stop and look at each other. All day we're running around doing this, that, and the other, like we're in a dream.

I remember that when I was in New York, I was having my breakfast, and somebody brought me a newspaper—the Sunday "New York Times." Do you know how heavy it is? It weighs two kilos. (Laughter.) How can you eat your breakfast and deal with two kilos of newspaper at the same time? Why do we need two kilos of paper? How can we eat that for breakfast? I did not understand New Yorkers when I was given that breakfast. How many forests do you need to cut down to make a newspaper like that? Many people buy the newspaper, but they don't read it, they just look at it a little bit, or they just use it to hold up in front of their faces so they don't have to look at their family members. Do you know what kind of advertisements they use to advertise the New York Times? They say "You don't have to read it all, but it's nice to know that it's there." That's how they advertise it, so we feel that if we don't buy the New York Times we're a little bit odd, and there may be some news that we don't know about that everybody else knows about, so we feel that we have to buy it.

Our way of life in New York is not the way of life of a happy person, of a free person, of a solid person. So we have to learn how to live like a solid, free person. Now it's time for the small children to go out.

(Bell)

Because of mistakes of our mother or our father, or our grandparents, we forget our roots, where we come from. We forget that our ancestors are the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, those who had the capacity to live happily, solidly, and as free people. So we run around, and we drown in our suffering. The Buddha and the bodhisattvas have manifested like these mother lionesses, looking for their children whom they have lost. The Buddhas and the bodhisattvas are full of patience, and all of us are the lion cubs who have lost our home. We have to be skillful, intelligent, finding a way back to our home.

We have the capacity to be happy, to be peaceful, to be free, yet living our daily lives, we suffer we drown. Under the burden of our suffering, we make those around us suffer too. Now we have to return to our true parents, learn how to walk again, learn how to stand again, learn how to sit again, learn how to lie down again, learn how to speak, learn how to listen again, in order to revive the behavior of a real lion. While we have lost our way, we have not yet been able to learn, or we have forgotten the customs, the ways, the life, which can bring us the quality of happiness which we should be enjoying.

If we are Jewish, our ancestors are the patriarchs Abraham and the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca and Ruth. Our ancestors had their own precepts, and they were able with those precepts to maintain their happiness and solidity with their own society. But because of some mistakes, some clumsiness of our parents or our ancestors, we have forgotten about our roots, and we have been wandering around in the world without remembering our roots, and therefore we have suffered.

Our ancestors may include Jesus Christ, and so many generations have followed the culture and the spiritual teachings of the lord Jesus Christ. They have been happy because of this. They have known how to love, and how to take refuge in each other because of these teachings. But because of some mistakes of a couple of generations, mistakes the church has made, we have left our congregations, we have left our church. We have been angry with our congregation, and we have been looking for a different spiritual path. We have been looking for Buddhism, and we have been looking for Hinduism, and we have thought that happiness cannot be in our Christian roots.

Perhaps we are Vietnamese, and because of some great misfortune, some mistakes of our leaders, we have had to leave our native land, go to a life very strange to us, learn how to stand, walk, think and behave in a way which is not the way of our ancestors. And we have brought suffering and afflictions into our minds and our bodies while we have wandered from our native land. We don't know that we have these roots. We think that we are a different species, and we don't think about going back to our roots.

We are a lotus flower with wonderful color and scent, but we have lost the fragrance and the color of a lotus, we do

not recognize the fragrance of the lotus as our fragrance. We go and buy some perfume and put it on us, and we say that that is our own flower's fragrance, and in the process of drifting like this we have learned many negative things in the new society we have come to. The beautiful things of that society do exist. They are in our new environment, but in order to learn these beautiful and good things of the new society, we need someone to direct us. The American culture has very beautiful and wonderful aspects about it, which we can learn, appreciate, and make use of, just as the lion cub can learn some wonderful things from the monkey family. But because we have no one to guide us or direct us, we allow all the garbage of the Western society in which we are living to fill us up. We do not pick out the jewels of the Western society, we only take the garbage of the Western society, and put it into ourselves. The hardships and misfortunes of drug taking, of sexual misconduct, are the garbage of Western culture. When we pour these things into our hearts and our minds, we will suffer in our bodies and our minds, and we will make our parents suffer, and our ancestors suffer.

We don't know that there are jewels; there are values in Western society, which we can learn about in order to enrich our own culture. We should know that in our own culture, in the Vietnamese culture, there are jewels too, and we have to gather these together and learn about them, because we come from this culture, that is our base. But because we are angry with our parents, we cannot communicate with our parents. Therefore our parents are not able to transmit to us the jewels, the precious things of our heritage and our tradition.

If mother and father cannot speak to their children, how can they transmit to them the values and virtues, which have been handed down in our tradition for so many generations? But there is a great gap between the young and the older generation. One of the reasons for this is that the older generation is so busy, has so many occupations, and the younger generation is so busy as well. All day the father and mother are very busy, and all day the children are very busy, and when they come home in the evening they are all so tired, and they may be irritated; annoyance arises because of the tiredness. Neither side knows how to listen deeply, how to use loving and harmonious speech. Therefore, the gap between the two generations grows greater every day, and suffering arises in the younger generation, and suffering is in the heart of the older generation as well. In the end the younger generation is not able to look at the older generation, and father and mother are not able to look at their children, because both have suffered from each other so much. We have not yet been able to receive ways of life, which come from our native culture, spiritual culture, and therefore we do not know the art of living. And in this kind of forgetfulness, this foolishness, this clumsiness, we make mistakes, just as when the mother lioness jumped across the river and in a moment of forgetfulness allowed her lion cub to fall into the ditch.

How many mothers and fathers suffer because they have lost their children? Why have they lost their children? Because they have been thoughtless, because they are clumsy. This does not only apply to Vietnamese parents, but it applies to Western parents as well. Because so many Western parents are so busy, they are not mindful, they are clumsy, and therefore they have lost their children too. Although the Western people do not have the same culture as the Vietnamese people, they have lost their son; they have lost their daughter, just like the Vietnamese people who came to live in the West. The Vietnamese people have more suffering than the Western people do, because not only do they have suffering caused by the generation gap, but they also have the suffering caused by the cultural gap. Although the Western people do not have this gap between two cultures, as experienced by the Vietnamese people, they do have the generation gap suffering. Maybe the culture of this generation is not the same as the culture of the preceding generation, and the father and mother cannot accept the culture of the new generation. Hairstyles are so different between the young and the old people, and just the matter of hairstyle is enough to make parents angry with their children. Young Vietnamese people have the culture of the West, and the music that the young people listen to is enough to give a headache to the older generation. Parents are so surprised that their children are able to listen to this kind of music. It is not only the Vietnamese families living in the West who have this problem of cultural gap, but it is a gap that Western families have as well.

It is a very difficult situation when mother and father cannot look at their children anymore, cannot feel happy looking at each other anymore, so that when we have a meal together we do not feel happy. Because we don't feel happy, we have to put the newspaper in front of our eyes, so we don't see the other members of our family. There are families where people don't like looking at each other anymore, and they just want to look in one direction. That is not the direction of their common ideal that is the direction of the television. They want to look in the direction of the television in order to suffer less and to forget their suffering. They are running away. They are running away from

reality—the reality, which includes suffering. Looking at our dear ones, we don't see them as very dear anymore. That face is full of suffering, and when that person looks at us, that person just sees nothing but suffering in our face. Therefore, we have a sort of secret agreement that we will both look at the television, so that we don't have to suffer any more. That is the truth of what happens in so many families, and we pretend that this isn't happening. Now we have to be brave, we have to have the courage to look at the truth, look straight into the face of the truth, and ask ourselves the question, why? Why have we allowed this situation to arise?

The lioness mother made a mistake: she allowed her lion cub to fall out of her, and lost it. We have done the same: we have lost our children because of our foolishness, and our children have lost mother and father, although mother and father are still alive. But mother and father cannot love their children anymore, cannot embrace their children anymore, cannot sit down to eat a meal with them anymore, and the children cannot see the value of the parents. This is a huge tragedy, not only for us Vietnamese refugees in the West, but also for those who are already living in the West. There are parents who wake up, just like the lioness mother woke up, and they recognize their clumsiness, the mistakes that they have made in the past, and they practice in order to get their children back. We know that the lioness was very patient, and very loving, with a lot of love, although sometimes she had to say some things that she didn't want to say, things that were difficult for her to say, like: "Little one, I am so sorry, you are not a lion cub, you are a monkey, and I was very impolite." Can you see how much that lioness must have suffered when she said those words? But because she loved the lion cub so much, she said those words.

When we are a father or a mother who has lost our children, or is about to lose our children, we have to wake ourselves up, and see the risk that we are going to lose our children. If we lose our children, we lose everything: we lose our future, because our children are ourselves. And therefore we have to do everything, anything we can, in order to get back our children. With that love, with that intention, we can do anything. If we just say, "I am the father or mother, and that's my child. It's not my grandmother, to whom I have to show respect and politeness." If we say that kind of thing, then we are not doing as the lioness mother did. If we have lost our children, and we do not go through the difficult moments of having to apologize, then our children will not come back. Therefore we have to learn from this lioness mother, we have to know how to come to our children, accept our mistakes, and gradually bring our children back to ourselves. Then, the communication between the children and parents can be restored. Then we can begin to transmit to our children the beautiful and the good things, which belong to our native culture, to our spiritual culture, which comes from Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and which has been handed down to our people.

If we are Christian, we should see the same. If we hate our church, we hate our priest, we hate our minister, or if we are a Jew and we hate our rabbi, we hate our synagogue, that is because our church or our synagogue has made mistakes, has not understood us, has forced us to do things when we do not understand the reasons for doing them. When we use our authority to force people to do things they don't understand, they will hate us, they will hate our Christianity or our Judaism, and they will abandon these things in order to look for another path of practice. The ministers, the rabbis, the priests, the fathers and mothers, should see clearly the mistakes they have made, and learn the way of the lioness mother. They should say to their children: "In our cultural heritage, in our society, there are negative things, there are ugly things, there are misunderstandings, there is lack of freedom, but that is not everything."

If we make an effort, go back to our culture, our spiritual and cultural way of life, we will discover many, many precious jewels in our tradition, whether it is Western or Eastern, whether it's Jewish or Christian or Buddhist. Buddhism has its beautiful things—Buddhism also has ugly things. These ugly things are there because there are people who have not understood Buddhist, and therefore they have made things "Buddhist" which are not in fact Buddhist. There are superstitions; there is oppression, forcing people to do things that are in fact superstitions. Forcing people to do things is not true Buddhism, but it has been introduced into Buddhism. There are so many beautiful things in Buddhism, and so many beautiful things that we can find in Christianity, so many beautiful things in Judaism, which we can find. But the people, who have been responsible in these different religions, because they have not had their own peace and joy, have behaved in a way that forces other people, an oppressive way. And the people have not been able to bear it, so they have abandoned their religion. So the lioness mother must wake up, must be skillful, must say, "I have made mistakes. Please forgive me." We have to call our children our friends when we do this. We have to speak to our children as we would speak to a friend, and we have to accept that we have made mistakes.

Our ancestors have made mistakes too. They have been clumsy, they have not been able to understand the true

transmission, they have not been able to understand the real virtues of our tradition, and they have done things, which are quite the opposite of the love and understanding, which are really there in the tradition. They have made use of religion in order to fight wars, in order to support violence, in order to support racial discrimination. These things are not the jewels of culture and religion, that is the garbage that has been made out of un-skillfulness, out of clumsiness. We have to recognize that these things are there, but they are not the only things. There are precious things, jewels, valuable things, so bright and shiny, things of happiness. If we go back together, we will be able to find these things, and we can hand them on for future generations to enjoy. Fathers and mothers have made mistakes, grandparents, ancestors have made mistakes, but that does not mean to say that this spiritual life has only ugly things—it has beautiful things, it has bright things, it has great things in it too. We have to know how to forgive, how to go back to our parents, so we can go together on a journey of discovery, to discover the beauty of our roots. I wonder how many people in the world are able to act as that mother lioness did?

This morning I had my breakfast with a novice monk. He is Vietnamese, and he grew up in the West. He was very successful in his studies in the West, he graduated as an architect, and he began to work as an architect. He was very happy in his work, but from the day that he met his lioness mother, he saw very clearly that his path was the path of coming home. He attended a retreat for Vietnamese people in the south of California. His English is perfect, he writes English very well, but his Vietnamese isn’t so good, and he knew very little about Vietnamese culture and the Buddhism of Vietnam. But in one retreat he was able to return to the values of his spiritual and cultural tradition.

Then he wrote me a letter, and he said, "What is architecture for? Architecture is to create spaces where people can live at ease and in peace and joy. I think that becoming a monk is also practicing a kind of architecture, because we also produce spaces where people can live at ease, with freedom. In becoming a monk I am really carrying on the ideal of becoming an architect." It is a very wonderful letter. Then he asked, "Please may I become a monk, because I think that if I become a monk, I will be able to help many people. He has only been a monk since last winter, but he returned home very quickly, and he can speak Vietnamese very well, and he has learned a lot about Vietnamese culture. He went very quickly because in his heart there was deep aspiration and a great deal of love.

All lion clubs who have lost their way can do as he did, because the lioness mother is there. We can’t say that she is not there. She is there with all her love. She has opened her heart in order to show the way to the lion cub when he comes home. All of us are lion cubs who have lost our mother, who have lost our race, who have lost our lineage. We have to listen to the call of our lioness mother, which is in our flesh, and go back to our roots. That is not only true for Vietnamese people who live in the West, but it is also true for Vietnamese people who are living in Vietnam, who find they have lost themselves. Vietnamese people who are here in the West feel that they are lost, because "This is not really my home, this is not really my society." And the Western society has made so many young people who also feel the same way: they do not feel at home even in their own society, and they feel they have lost their way. They don’t have direction, they cannot recognize their ancestors, they cannot recognize their parents. Can there be any greater suffering than the suffering of a Vietnamese refugee who is wandering around without roots, or of a Western youngster who has no roots? This morning we sang the poem "Looking for Each Other," to remind us that we have to return to our roots, to our source.

In the past there were Catholic missionaries who came to Vietnam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and their methods as missionaries were not very good. They encouraged Vietnamese people, "Please, do not worship your ancestors. Do not worship the Buddha. Throw all that away. Get rid of your altars; do not offer incense there anymore. You should only believe in Jesus Christ." They wanted us; they wanted to pull us up from our roots, because our roots are the reverence for the ancestors, and the reverence for the Buddha. Because of their very narrow way of looking at things, they wanted to cut us off from our roots. Therefore they formed a lot of people who didn’t have roots.

When I came to the West, I did not come as a missionary. I came in order to call for an end to the Vietnamese war. Because I am a monk, wherever I go, I have to practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, and breathing. Young people in the West agreed with me, and wanted to work with me to bring an end to the war between the United States and Vietnam, and they learned how to breathe, they learned how to eat in mindfulness. While they participated in these things, they felt well, they felt light and happy, and they said, "Please, Thay, please teach us the way of practicing mindfulness. That is why I wrote books like "The Miracle of Mindfulness," to help my young friends to be able to practice mindfulness. When that book was first published, it was called "The Miracle of Being Awake,"

because I was afraid that the term "mindfulness" was a little too specialized. After that book had been published, Pax Christi in England liked the book very much, and they published it again, for people in their organization to be able to use. The people who did this were very intelligent, they were able to recognize the value of mindfulness practice in Buddhism for their own tradition, and their own congregation used this. I remember in California that there was an order of Catholic nuns who used this book for all the students of that order.

My friends encouraged me to lead retreats, where so many people have learned mindfulness, and I have never said, "Please give up your tradition to follow me." I say, "If you are Jewish, please do not abandon your Jewish roots. You can study Buddhism with me, but that will help you to go back to Judaism and discover the jewels in Judaism, that may have been covered up by layers, so that you haven't seen them. If you are Christian, please do not abandon your Christian roots, do not abandon your Christian ancestors." You are a lion, and you don't want to be a monkey. A lion can only be happy when it is a lion. Although it can learn the wonderful things that a monkey does, it cannot be really happy when it is cut off from its roots, when it is cut off from its lion lineage. A Catholic is the same. Even though you are angry with your church, with your priests, with your parents, you should know that those are your roots, and you come from those roots. So I encourage you, come to the Buddhist monastery, learn how to practice mindfulness, and then you will see that in your own spiritual tradition there are jewels, and you will return to that tradition, and help re-establish those jewels in your tradition. Although there are negative things there, which have made the young people leave that church, try to find the jewels in your own tradition, so that the young people will have something to go back to, and there can be reconciliation between yourself and your ancestral tradition, and between yourself and your parents.

We have to reconcile not only with our spiritual traditions, but also with our blood traditions, and this is going back home. A tree, which has been cut off from its roots cannot be happy. If you dig up a tree, and you put it in a strange environment, even though you give it a lot of fertilizer, it cannot be happy. A person is the same: if you pull it up by its roots, and put it down somewhere else, it will not be happy. I am very aware of this, and that is why I have never encouraged anybody to give up his or her roots. I say, "You are Christian; do not give up your Christian roots. You are Jewish; do not give up your Jewish roots. This practice of mindfulness will help you to return to your roots, to transform the things that have gone wrong in your tradition, and allow the bright things to shine out again from your tradition." Therefore, I am determined to do that only, and I will never allow somebody to lose their roots, and I will always encourage people to go back to their roots. The story that the Buddha told about the lion cub was told for this very reason. We have been wandering for so many generations, and we must return home in order to re-establish the relationship with our parents, reconcile with our native land, and reconcile with our spiritual ancestors.

(Bell)

Last May, I was in the United States, in May and June. Once, we were going through a town, a small town, and I saw an advertisement. There were two parts to it, one before, and one after, with maybe a hundred meters between the two. It was in English. The first part of the advertisement said: *"Troubled? Why not try prayer?"* The second sentence said: *"The family that prays together, stays together."* A church had placed these advertisements. Now, let us look and see whether there is any truth in this: that families that pray together every day will remain whole, and not be broken. The answer is, if we know how to pray together, we will not have breakage in our families. I think it's possible that this is true. But once a family has been broken, are we able to sit together and pray? Is the practice of prayer strong enough to prevent a family breaking? How do we pray in order for the family not to break? What is the content of our prayer? These are questions that we have to ask the minister of our church.

We know that prayer has an effect on our way of thinking and on our way of acting, but often, people pray a lot and there isn't really much result. Maybe because they just stick to the form, they say the name of the Buddha, they recite a great number of sutras, but their suffering doesn't seem to transform at all. The communication between them and others doesn't grow any better. In Taipei I heard about a woman who went to the temple and recited the sutras so much, but the situation did not get any better. Her husband was running after another woman, and she came to the temple in order to pray for her husband to leave the other woman and come back to her. She did this for several years, but it didn't have any effect. She came to me and asked why. I said, "You have to pray and recite the sutras and say the name of the Buddha so that every day you become more peaceful, you become more fresh, you become better at listening deeply, you become better at speaking lovingly, and that is correct prayer. But if you pray, and you are still

very bitter, you are still very difficult, you are still very grumpy, what good will that do to help your husband come back home? Do something every day so that you can become more peaceful in your heart, you can become better at listening, and have the capacity to say sweet things. You can be loyal and not get angry quickly."

Reciting the sutras and praying are things that we need to do, but we have to do it in such a way that it really influences the way that our bodies and minds are. When we ask the question how should we pray, the answer is that we have to pray together. The question is not do we pray or do we not pray. The question is, do we know how to pray. When we practice mindfulness, we have to pray with our bodies, we don't only pray with our minds, because our bodies are very important. For example, we do walking meditation. Walking meditation is a form of prayer. Every step helps us to come back to the present moment, and gives us more solidity and more freedom. Every step like that, although we don't say any words, is a prayer, because it brings about a change in our person. When we sit on a cushion, and we let go of everything, and we breathe in and feel calm, breathe out and smile, that is also a kind of prayer. That prayer is done with our lungs, with our noses. We breathe in such a way that we are calm, and that calmness brings about a smile. That kind of prayer has an effect, because after twenty or thirty minutes we go out and we feel calmer, lighter, more patient.

When we eat a meal that is a form of praying. We eat in such a way that we are happy, we are solid, and we are free. We have to eat breakfast properly, and if someone looks at us, they will see us as if they were looking at someone who is praying. Every movement we make, the way we sit, in a very leisurely way, with time, we sit very solidly, like a lioness. Everyone sits; but if we know how to sit in a relaxed way, very solid, very free, then we look as if we are praying. As we are pouring the milk, we still have freedom and solidity—we stay in the present moment. And when we break the bread, it is as if the priest is breaking the bread in the Eucharist. We dwell in the moment, and we put the bread in our mouths, and we know that we are eating bread, and at that time we are really alive. The bread is real. We are real. We eat the bread in peace, in concentration, in solidity, and we are happy. That kind of breakfast doesn't just nourish our bodies it nourishes our minds. And if someone looks at us eating like that, it looks as if we are performing a ceremony.

This is not really a ceremony it is just eating breakfast. But when we have a drink of water, it is the same. We lift up our glass to drink, and if we do it with mindfulness, if we dwell in the present moment, drinking water is something very deep, very solid, and very free. And as we drink, we have the happiness of drinking water. Somebody looking at us will think we are celebrating a very solemn ceremony, but in fact we are only drinking water.

We are really there as we drink water, and we are really alive in the moment we drink water, and we are really alive in that moment, as we drink water. People who look at us think we are celebrating a solemn ceremony, but we are drinking water. We have to learn how to eat our breakfast so that when we are eating breakfast we don't run as though we are thieves, or as though thieves are after us. We have to eat in such a way that we are free people, that we are relaxed, that we are happy. Don't say that you don't know how to do it, I've taught you so many times. The thing is that you don't do it. Do you have half an hour? Can you use that half-hour to eat breakfast properly, deeply? You don't do it; you don't live in the environment of the Sangha. If you did, you would do it all the time. In Plum Village the permanent residents eat breakfast properly, and make breakfast into prayer. Eating breakfast mindfully makes people present in body and mind, and if you are here for seven days, don't use those seven days to worry and suffer; use those seven days to learn how to drink, how to eat, how to walk in mindfulness, and every moment of these seven days must be a moment of prayer.

When we are really praying, it will mean that we become freer, we become fresher every moment. Some children say: "Why are our parents so cruel at home, and when they come here they are so kind?" The children benefit from that change. When the parents are happy they help the children, and then the children in turn are much happier, and in turn they make the parents happier. This is a kind of prayer, but in fact we're not using words; we're not saying, "We respect father and mother." All we're doing is walking and sitting in mindfulness, and producing the energy of mindfulness to make ourselves healthier and happier. Because of that our relationships with others become better. So to make relationships in the home better, we have to live our daily lives in a certain way. We have to live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are not to force us to do something; they are a way of living in mindfulness.

Mindfulness is to live with awareness, to know that if I do that, it causes harm, and to know that if I don’t do this, it causes happiness. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are to keep our bodies and minds healthy, and to keep our families healthy. This is the truth we have to accept: that if we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we will protect our bodies and minds, keeping them healthy, and protecting the relationships between ourselves and others, so that the relationships will not be broken. It is sure that the only way out for us is the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. When we come to a practice center like this, we should know that if we receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings and bring them home and practice them, that is prayer which will protect us and protect the bodies and minds of those that we love. If we practice according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we can be sure that our families will never be broken, that is something that we can be completely certain about.

Today, Brother Sanghakaya will meet the Vice-President of America, and he asked me, "What should I talk to the Vice-President about?" and I said, "The Five Mindfulness Trainings." I said to talk about the Third Mindfulness Training, saying that with the Third Mindfulness Training you wouldn’t have the difficulties that you’ve had in these past months. Because if President Clinton had kept the Mindfulness Trainings, he wouldn’t have had these ups and downs, he wouldn’t have had these difficult questions asked him by journalists, while he has so much work to do. For his family, for his nation, he has these terrible questions he has to answer. He needs the Mindfulness Trainings not only to protect himself, but also to protect his whole nation. His whole nation really needs the Five Mindfulness Trainings. If everyone in the American society, and in the French society, would live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, it is sure that the American people, and the French people, would not meet the disaster that we are running to meet.

The Third Mindfulness Trainings says, "Move away from sexual misconduct. If two bodies unite, it can only happen when there is a long-term commitment." If you have had experience, you will know this. If there are not love and a long-term commitment, and there is the coming together of two bodies, this sexual activity will bring about suffering for both sides. We think that by sleeping together we will be less lonely, because we all have loneliness in us, and naively, we think that if we sleep with that person that we won’t feel so lonely, but in fact the opposite is what happens. We’ve slept with each other so many times, and in fact we haven’t felt any less lonely; in fact we have felt more angry and frustrated than we did before, because our bodies may unite, but there is absolutely no communication between our souls, there is no harmony between our souls. Therefore, to live according to the Third Mindfulness Training is to protect our bodies and our minds, to protect the body and the mind of the other.

Mindfulness trainings are for protection. We protect ourselves by practicing mindfulness, and we protect the bodies and minds of others. A second of mistaken behavior can bring about so much suffering in the future, and that is not only true for a president, but it is true for all of us. If we make mistakes, even just for a moment, the suffering for us, and for others in the future, could be very great. Therefore, we should practice the Third Mindfulness Training, in order to protect our own bodies and to protect the bodies and minds of others, and to protect the young people of our society. So many of them suffer for their whole lives because of sexual misconduct. If we are mother, father, uncle, or aunt, or grandparent, and we don’t know how to keep the Mindfulness Trainings, and we make our children suffer because of that, then it is a terrible shame for our children. The Third Mindfulness Training is very necessary. If we do not keep the Third Mindfulness Training, our families will break. When our family is broken, what can we do? It is not enough to call on God once our family is broken. The only way to stop our family breaking is to practice the Third Mindfulness Training. That is the most effective way to keep our families together. Not only mother and father keep the Third Mindfulness Training, the children also keep the Third Mindfulness Training, and then the family will not be broken. Countless families have been broken because they have not practiced the Third Mindfulness Training. The Third Mindfulness Training is a prayer. It is a prayer we pray together. We don’t pray with our minds, we pray with our bodies.

And the Fourth Mindfulness Training, what is it? The Fourth Mindfulness Training is to know how to listen deeply, to know how to use loving speech, words which express our love. The Fourth Mindfulness Training is just that. We never use words of swearing, or blaming, or condemning, and when someone speaks we have to listen. When somebody wants to say something we shouldn’t shout and try to interrupt him or her. When we practice listening deeply, we can help the other a great deal. The other person has been suffering, and he or she hasn’t been able to talk about this suffering. Nobody has ever bothered to sit down and listen deeply to him or her, and therefore his or her suffering has not been relieved. Now we sit with him, or with her, like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and we listen with all our

compassion, so that he or she can speak about their suffering. Even though the other person says things that are due to wrong perceptions that we don't agree with, maybe what he or she says is bitter, or he or she is condemning us, still, because of our compassion, we are able to sit and listen. When he speaks, he suffers less. Then, a few days later, you will go to him and you will say, "You know, when you spoke the other day I saw how you were suffering. I understood you. But there were one or two things that I don't think you had understood, and that I would like to explain to you, so that you understand better what I was doing." By using this kind of loving speech, we help the other person get out of his wrong perceptions, and there will be change.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is to make the gap between us disappear, the obstacles between us disappear, so that we can come together and re-establish communication. Therefore, the Fourth Mindfulness Training is a prayer, and we pray with our heart, we pray with our mouth. We don't need the name of Jesus Christ, we don't need the name of Buddha, we only need our ears to listen deeply, and our mouths to say loving things. After three days, five days, seven days, the situation will change. The person will see that we have become more kind. Before we were like a wall, whatever somebody said to us, it wouldn't go through. We were hard as a stone; now we have become gentle and soft, and we are able to listen to what the other says. And when we speak, it is very light and pleasant. That is the Fourth Mindfulness Training—it's not something we do because we want to do it, it's something we do because we have practiced to do it, because the Sangha has supported us in our practice. In Plum Village there are so many things we can learn with the Sangha in order to be able to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training. When we practice this training in our family, we protect our family: our family will be whole and protected; it will not be broken. If everyone knows how to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training, even if not completely, then we can be sure that the family will not break.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training is about consumption. We have to be mindful when we consume. We have to know there are foods for our bodies, and for our souls, which are wholesome and healthy. When we eat them we will feel light, we will feel relieved, and we will be nourished in our bodies and our minds. But there are also things which, when we eat them, will destroy our bodies and our minds. There are books, there are newspapers, and there are television programs, which contain many poisons. We look at a newspaper, we look at a film, and so much violence, so much hatred, so much misunderstanding, so much fear, enters our bodies and our minds. When we stuff ourselves with this kind of thing every day, how can we avoid being sick? When we get angry, we just want to find an axe, or a knife, or a gun to shoot the other person. We don't know how to use loving speech. We don't know how to listen deeply, because we have ingested so much violence through the television programs. Every day we nourish ourselves with these kinds of poisons, violence, fear, and despair. Books, images, these things contain so many poisons, including craving and desire. Advertisements tell us, "You have to buy this to be happy." And if we buy this, we receive all the bad consequences.

Happiness does not come from consuming. Happiness comes from removing the suffering in us all, and then happiness will appear. This is something very wonderful. Many of us think that happiness comes from consuming something, from bringing something from outside into us, but in fact, happiness comes from inside. When we can remove the materials of anger, violence, hatred, and despair from our souls, then happiness will open like a lotus flower, or like a rose. The happiness of a flower does not come from outside, the happiness of a flower comes from inside the flower, and our happiness is the same. Because we have negative material in our bodies and minds, we are not happy. If we can take these things out of our bodies, if we can drink a lot of source water, and urinate, then our bodies will feel happiness.

It's not because we eat a lot that we feel happy, especially when we eat poisonous things that make our body heavier and heavier every day. Our souls are the same: it's not because we digest many films, many books, many magazines that we feel happy, it's because we are able to remove the poisons from our souls. That is what listening to a Dharma talk is for. Listening to a Dharma talk is to take the misunderstanding out of us, to take the ignorance out of us, to take the craving out of us, to take the anger and hatred out of us. The more we take out of us, the more our hearts will feel light and free, and happiness will be possible. Happiness grows from inside out. You must remember that. You do not need to look for happiness outside of you. Therefore, the Fifth Mindfulness Training is about consuming in mindfulness. Every day, what we eat, what we drink, what we consume in the way of books and relationships is very important, because when we consume like that we can bring so many toxins into our bodies.

There are children who sit in front of the television for three hours a day, and during those three hours, they stuff into their souls so much violence. When they go out into society they do just as they have seen on the television. When we don't like something, we want to eliminate it. We have a remote control, and when we don't like something we just eliminate what we don't like with that. When we can't get rid of somebody whom we hate, we shoot him or her to get rid of them quickly. But once we've done that, we have to be in the prison, so we don't really get rid of them as quickly as we thought. We have no patience, we have no love, we have no understanding, and these things are because of what we receive in our daily lives, through what we consume. And that is not really real life, it is more like real death, it is like suicide. .

We say that monks and nuns are not really alive, because they don't enjoy television and books; but in fact the monks and nuns are really alive. They don't consume toxins, they don't stuff themselves with these toxins, and therefore they are light in body and mind. We have television sets here, but television sets in the Upper and Lower Hamlets are used only to listen to Dharma talks, and all the television sets are practicing here, just like the monks and nuns. They never show scenes of craving, anger and violence. Here, consumption is in mindfulness. We never eat that kind of food, of violence.

If you are here for a year, you will be better in your mind, better in your body, because you have practiced the Fifth Mindfulness Training. Outside they talk badly about each other—this temple accuses the other temple, this person accuses the other person, but here we don't say unkind things about each other; we don't have the right to. We don't listen to each other saying unkind things about each other. If you stay here for seven days, fourteen days, you will feel better, and that is because you have practiced the Fifth Mindfulness Training, and the Fifth Mindfulness Training is a prayer. Every day we consume in mindfulness that is prayer. If we keep the Third, the Fourth, the Fifth Mindfulness Training, it is quite sure that our family will remain together.

Whenever I see someone kneel down and receive the Mindfulness Trainings, I feel happy. I feel happy for that person, I feel happy for that family, and I really want President Clinton, and President Chirac, and all the ministers to receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Buddhists can receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings from me; Christians can receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings from their priest or their minister, because the Five Mindfulness Trainings are available in Christianity too. They are very clear, the way that I have written them. Young people can read them. They are not prohibitions; they are not forcing you to do something. It is only because we have seen how much suffering there is that we are committed to keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Nobody forces us to keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings. It is only because we have woken up, we have seen that if we do not practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings our family will be broken, our society will be broken. That is why we have a deep aspiration to practice this way. And when at a retreat I see three hundred, four hundred, five hundred people kneel down to receive the Mindfulness Trainings, I feel so happy that I want to cry, because I know that the Mindfulness Trainings will help them to protect themselves, to protect their families, to protect their society.

Here we are living in a place where wine is made, but when there are four or five people who resolve not to drink a drop of wine for a day, I feel happy. Wine, alcohol, has brought about so many broken families. In the United States, in France, so many children have grown up suffering like hungry ghosts because the parents are alcoholic. The children go out and look for drugs to forget their suffering, and because of these drugs, the government has to use all sorts of violent means to put an end to drug trafficking. If we kept the Five Mindfulness Trainings, if everybody in our land lived according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we wouldn't need governments to use violent means to put an end to drug taking.

The Health Ministry in France gives advertisements from time to time, to help people drink less wine, because so many road accidents happen because of drinking wine. I remember once they had an advertisement that said, "One glass—okay; three glasses—hello to disaster." And I said, "How can the third glass be possible if we didn't have the first glass?" Therefore, my idea is to get rid of the first glass, because once there is the first glass, you may be thirsty for the second glass or the third glass. Once you have the second glass, you lose all your clarity and calm. The best way is not to have the first glass. If all the people who have vineyards around me heard me talking they would be very angry with me. I know they would suffer if people didn't drink wine, but when we hear the siren of the ambulance going quickly along the road to an accident…just a few days ago, four or five young people in Duras who were drunk drove their car into the lake and they all drowned, because they did not keep the Fifth Mindfulness Training.

The parents drink, and the therefore children drink—it’s quite natural. How much should we drink? Very often he police have with them something you breathe into, and they know if you have been drinking and driving. There are so many wonderful things we can drink which are not alcoholic, so many juices. If we keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are not only protecting our own bodies, our own minds: we are protecting our children and our parents. If as children we are to die, then the parents will feel as if they have died too, and if the parents die, the children will feel as if they have died too. So when we protect ourselves, we are protecting others. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are not an individual matter. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are a national matter. If the whole nation practices the Five Mindfulness Trainings the nation will be happy. There will not be broken families, broken society. Therefore, we know that the five Mindfulness Trainings are the most concrete way to practice mindfulness. If we receive the mindfulness trainings, and we encourage everyone in our family to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, that day will be the happiest day of our lives, for our family will remain together, and our family life of simplicity and beauty will influence other families in our society.

(Three Bells)

(End of Dharma Talk)